

Health and social challenges of street children in Enugu Urban, Southeast, Nigeria

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Background: Street children phenomenon is global, alarming, escalating and becoming public health concern especially in developing countries including Nigeria. In Enugu urban, it is common to see children left to loiter, hawking or doing some menial tasks with or without consent of parents or guardians with the attendant challenges. This poses a serious future problem if these children are not studied, harnessed by planning appropriate intervention programme.

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess health and social challenges of street children in Enugu Urban, Enugu State, Southeast, Nigeria.

Methods & Materials: A cross sectional survey design was used for the study. Due to the transitory nature of street children, convenience sampling technique was used to select 384 study subjects. A validated structured interviewer administered questionnaire was used for data collection. Data was analyzed with the aid of SPSS version 20. P-values < 0.05 were considered significant association.

Results: Out of 384 subjects studied 220 (58.4%) were males with a mean age of 12 years. Majority of the subjects 350 (87.8%) were Christians. About half of the study participants live with both parents while only (12.2%) live with friends or guardians. The main reason for being in the street was to augment family income (62.8%). Major health challenges experienced by the participants included cough (75.9%), headaches (75.6%) body pains (71.9%) and body weakness (65.8%). The major social challenges were hunger (69.5%), verbal abuse (62.3%), harsh weather (63.2%) and dropping out of school (46.9%). Tiredness, wound and bruises were significantly associated with gender (males). The study concluded that economic hardship of parents/guardians was the major cause of street children phenomenon in Enugu urban Enugu State. It is therefore recommended that empowering parents with soft loan to enable them engage in agriculture or trading will help in ameliorating the financial hardship experienced by parents. Also providing basic skill acquisition centers for mothers to improve their economic power will contribute to the reduction of the increasing street children in Enugu urban.

Biography

Ijeoma O Ehiemere is a Professor of Nursing (Community Health) at the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus. She is a Fellow of the West African College of Nursing and had previously taught in School of Nursing Bida, Niger state and School of Midwifery Ilorin, Kwara state. She became a Registered Nurse and Midwife in 1975 and 1978 respectively. She holds a BSc (Nursing Education) from the University of Ibadan, MSc (Community Health) from University of Ilorin and PhD from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. At the University of Nigeria, she has devoted many years of teaching and research in Nursing Sciences and Community Health Nursing at all levels. She pioneered, established and coordinates the Community Health Outreach Programme of the Department of Nursing Sciences at the University of Nigeria and has served as Head of Department of Nursing Sciences and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Technology, University of Nigeria. She has been the Departmental postgraduate Programme Coordinator from 2012 to date. Her research interests include Maternal and Child Health (MCH), Adolescent Reproductive Health (ARH) and Care for the elderly. She has authored a book and has published several articles in reputable journals nationally and internationally.

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